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**27 MEMBERS OF VIOLENT CRACK COCAINE
DISTRIBUTION RING PLEAD GUILTY IN ABILENE**

United States Attorney Richard B. Roper announced today that 27 members of a crack cocaine distribution ring operating in Abilene, Texas, and other areas in Northern Texas, pled guilty yesterday in Abilene before the Honorable Sam R. Cummings, United States District Judge, to their involvement in the drug conspiracy or organization. That operation was dismantled in July when numerous members of the drug organization were arrested in Abilene and Fort Worth, Texas. Their trial was scheduled to begin on Monday in Abilene.

U.S. Attorney Roper said, "This significant case represents the determination of federal and local law enforcement to address drug trafficking issues in West Texas. The teamwork between federal and state agencies guaranteed that these large scale drug traffickers would be brought to justice."

In June 2004, a federal grand jury in Lubbock, Texas, returned an indictment against Scott Edward Conner, age 24, of Abilene and Fort Worth, Texas, and numerous other members of his organization. That indictment charged the defendants with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute various quantities of cocaine and cocaine base (crack cocaine). Some of the defendants were also charged with various firearms violations.

The indictment alleged that Scott Edward Conner was the leader of a drug trafficking organization responsible for distributing and possessing with intent to distribute various quantities of cocaine and cocaine base (crack cocaine). The Conner Organization distributed the crack cocaine and cocaine in powder form knowing that other conspirators would use it to manufacture crack cocaine.

A sentencing date has not yet been set. Scott Edward Conner faces a maximum statutory sentence of life imprisonment.

United States Attorney Roper praised the coordinated efforts of local, state, and federal law enforcement, including the Drug Enforcement Administration (Lubbock and Fort Worth), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (Lubbock and Fort Worth), the Abilene Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Taylor County Sheriff's Office.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Tanya Pierce and Special Assistant United States Attorney Amy Burch of the Lubbock, Texas, United States Attorney's Office.

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